

## **Arbitrary Power Or, on Organization without Ends**

This text has only one motif: it tries to think *what we can* at the moment when the species-being of human beings which is without any function and always open to change is tried to be appropriated and subordinated to the service of a particular historical period and its tasks.

To say “I can” does not refer to any unfailing or particular capacity, but it is in case very demanding. “I can” does not mean any particular ability and it is still perhaps the most severe and cruel experience possible: the experience of potentiality.

This experience is the experience at the moment when the generic human capacities – intellect, perception and linguistic-relational abilities – which make human beings ‘humans’ and do not exist for any particular reasons enter to our immediate experience. This is the meaning of the concept *multitude*: it is the form of being human in which the ontological condition enters to economy and politics (our immediate experience). For the first time it is possible to experience what it means to be a human being “as such”. We can look directly to the eye our existence as potential beings which do not have any particular surrounding, any particular task or function, that is, as beings which can do anything and from which anything may be expected. We experience at the same time the abundance of our possibilities and the arbitrariness of all reasons and constraints. This experience makes us restless, it makes us bored and it makes us homeless. But it makes us also strong.

### **Biopolitical Economy**

What defines economy and our experience of it today is that the bare humanness of human beings, that general potentiality and linguistic-relational abilities which make human beings “human” has entered economic production “as such”. This is the meaning of biopolitical economy.

To say that the general human abilities have entered into production “as such” means that they no longer require the mediating mechanism of modern economy to be “productive” and to have “value”. In biopolitical economy wealth is produced in modalities that are no longer conceivable within the concepts of modern economy: it is impossible to restrict production to the closed time and place of the ‘factory-office’. Production has rather become spatially boundless and temporarily endless: the factory-office and its borders have dissolved into society, into a multitude of productive singularities whose productivity cannot be reduced to actual production, to any actual mode of existence, to any historical time. The modern economy – i.e. economy that has as its restricted aim the self-increase of already existing capital or what Marx calls the necessary “tendency to concretization” of value – cannot appropriate this production with the concepts that are necessary to its restricted conception of wealth. The restricted economy is in crisis because its foundation has collapsed.

But even if the foundation of modern capitalism has collapsed, it does not mean that it does not function: even if the “time of production” can no longer be measured, it is still under attempts of control. But to do this modern economy must give itself up, it must go beyond its limits, break

its laws and move to operate without a foundation in a “state of anomy”. It is the only way it can spread and unfold from the factory-office to every corner of society and life. This means the end of modern economy and the birth of arbitrary power.

The birth of arbitrary power means that the concept of biopower turns out to be inadequate for understanding the functioning of capitalism without a foundation. First of all, the target of the new forms of organization and control is no longer the “biolife” (life at the basis of Foucault’s and Agamben’s conception of biopower) but the life of the mind or the entire time-life (vs. worktime). Secondly, unlike modern institutions of power the new uninstitutional “institutions” have no fixed point of reference, no permanent “sense” or “reason” which would give them legitimation. They operate without a foundation in a permanent state of anomy.<sup>1</sup>

This change in the functioning of power takes place when we move from the organization and control of direct labour (*discipline*) and from the organization and control of the life of a population (*biopolitics*) – which were at the heart of the functioning of modern economy – to the organization and control of the indeterminate “life of a mind” or labour power as a “mental category” which is without any spatial coordinates (*arbitrary power*). Knowledge economy (or biopolitical economy) is the continuance of capitalist economy without a foundation, and arbitrary power is its logical form of organization.

But let me start from the beginning.

### **The Bond Between Life and Capitalism**

According to Michel Foucault, the indispensable “event in the development of capitalism” was not the ascetic morality which seemed to abandon life and the living body, but the “entrance of life into history”.<sup>2</sup> This event was significant because the central assumption of modern political thinking had been that the political order cannot be based on life as such.<sup>3</sup> Foucault tried to outline this change with his concept of biopower.

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<sup>1</sup> In Finnish, there is a specific word which maybe best combines both senses of the emerging power: *mielivalta*. It reads literally *mind-power* or *sense-power* – the meaning of the word *mieli* is etymologically in the German words *der Sinn* (sense), *das Gemüt* (mind), *die Launen* (mood), *die Lust* (desire), *der Verstand* (reason, understanding), *die Ansicht* (view, opinion), *die Absicht* (intent, mind), *die Erinnerung* (memory); and *valta* means power (in the sense of *Macht*, *pouvoir*, *potestas*) – but its first meaning is a use of power that is not based on ‘reason’ (or on law, rules, objective facts), that is a power that is *mindless* and *senseless* or *arbitrary*. *Mielivalta* is arbitrary power over life of the mind.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault 1990, 141

<sup>3</sup> In the Classical world the simple, natural life, the fact of living (*zoê*), which was common to all living beings (animals, human beings, gods), was plainly marginal from the perspective of the way of living proper to an individual or a group, that is, from a qualified life, the good life (*bios*). It is on the basis of this distinction that Aristotle, for example, defines *polis* in the beginning of *Politics*: “[*polis* is] born with regard to life, but existing essentially with regard to good life” (*Politics*, 1252b: 29-30). It is also in this sense that Aristotle stresses the difference between *politikos* (statesman) vs. *oikonomos* (head of an estate) and *despotês* (master of the family) who are both concerned with the reproduction and subsistence of life (*Politics I*, 1252a: 5-10). As a living being, man’s place was in *oikos* (dwelling, home, household) and as a political subject it was in *polis* (city-state, body of citizens). The entire Aristotelian tradition is quite clear that this was a difference constituted already in human nature: in so far as man was to realize his nature as a political animal, as a ‘living being who has language’, this was to take place in the *polis*, the community. Politics was almost as if the difference between the fact of living and good life, the place were mute life (realizing itself in the *oikos*) transformed itself into good life, that is, into political life that took place in language: political order was constituted on the

But perhaps we should conclude talking about biopower, perhaps we have chatted enough about the indistinction between life and politics. Even so much so, that the concept of biopower has become a kind of a magic word, or a fetish word, which covers problems more than it helps us to solve them. Too often we hear the scream of a little child who is afraid of dark: Mama! Mama! Biopower! Biopower!

Perhaps it might be time to ask why did life enter history, or more precisely, and more faithfully to Foucault's methodology, what was the context of reasonings, the system of statements, or the "complementary space" where this took place and of which this cannot be separated.<sup>4</sup> Why did the phenomena particular to the life of the human species enter into the sphere of political techniques (the order of knowledge and power)? Why and how does the question of guarding and protecting life become a central public question: why does the state control and regulate life?

In the heart of *Capital* Marx outlines the encounter of two elements – wealth and man – which was to form the initial phase of capitalism. This encounter was an encounter in a specific form, or more precisely an encounter without a form: a conjunction of the capacity to labour freed from the many (different, concrete, particular, material) means of employment, the constraints and guarantees of a particular form of life and that of wealth in general freed from any specific means of its investment (landed property vs. capital-money). This is also what Deleuze and Guattari call the original axiom of capitalism, the encounter of the deterritorialized worker who was free to sell his labour power and the decoded wealth which had become general capital-money.

As Marx says, Engels was right to call Adam Smith the economic Luther.<sup>5</sup> Whereas Luther's merit was to have determined the essence of religion, no longer on the side of the object, but as an interior religiosity, the merit of Adam Smith and David Ricardo was to have determined the essence or nature of wealth no longer as an objective nature but as an abstract and undetermined subjective essence, the activity of production in general.<sup>6</sup> The key to understanding the bond between life and the development of capitalism is in this man–wealth relationship. The

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humanness of living man, on his having a language, not on the fact of living itself, on him having a voice. It is not by chance that this passage of the *Politics* situates the place of *polis* in the transformation from voice to language: "Among living beings only man has language. The voice is the sign of pain and pleasure, and this is why it belongs to other living beings [...]. But language is for manifesting the fitting and the unfitting and the just and the unjust. To have a sensation of the good and the bad and of the just and the unjust is what is proper to men as opposed to other living beings, and the community of these things makes dwelling and the city" (*Politics I*, 1253a: 10-18). The humanity of living man becomes thus determined in the 'politization' of life. The animal who has language is the political animal. This is the original tie between politics and metaphysics. See Agamben (1998: 7); Virno (2003: 31-32). Both Agamben and Foucault agree that we can no longer distinguish between the simple fact of living (*zoê*) and the good life (*bios*); between our biological life as living beings and our political existence; between what is incommunicable and mute (or has only a voice), and what is communicable and sayable (or whose place is in language). We are animals in whose politics our very life as living beings is at stake: "for millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living man with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (Foucault, 1990: 143). Life 'as such', set apart from its different forms – an idea impossible in the Greek and Roman tradition – now becomes the centre of political order.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gilles Deleuze: Foucault. Les Éditions Minuit. Paris 1986, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, 1844: 128-129; Engels, 1844.

<sup>6</sup> In their topology Deleuze and Guattari (1972: 270) add here also Freud who had determined the essence or nature of desire no longer in a relation to objects, aims, or even sources but as an abstract subjective essence, that is, libido or sexuality.

capitalistic relation of production is based on the distinction between actual labour and labour power in general (measured by its effective use) which displaces wealth into a relation with the human activity of production in general – a distinction and a displacement possible only by the beginning of the order of knowledge called political economy. The source of wealth is no longer located in exchange or in the positive balance of trade as in the case of mercantilism (or in a specific type of labour as the physiocrats did with agricultural labour), but in the capacity for subjective productive activity in general. The value is determined by the cost of abstract productive activity in general. The common element that makes exchange values commensurable, i.e. which is expressed by exchange value, is labour. The quantity of labour determines the quantity of each exchange value. But as all labour is different – concrete, material, particular, incommensurable – the only labour that can be viewed purely quantitatively is abstract labour, “the human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure”.<sup>7</sup>

The essence of the question of the relationship between man and wealth is, in other words, not in the productivity of actual labour but in the exchangeability of the potential to work in general. This potential to work, that is, human labour power which is indifferent to its means and objects and capable of being employed anywhere, becomes now articulated as the basis of the production of wealth in capitalism.

### **What is Labour Power?**

According to Marx, labour power means the general potential to produce, “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being”.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it refers to a general human ability or capacity without regard to any specific task or assignment. It is potentiality for anything: anything may be expected from it. Labour power refers to the general human potential to produce which must be distinguished from the actual production just like the capacity for digestion must be distinguished from actual digestion.<sup>9</sup> Labour power’s mode of being could in this sense said to be that of potentiality, *dynamis*, the fundamental category of philosophical thought which is, according to Aristotle, the mode in which human beings exist in so far as they know and produce (Metaphysics 1045b-1046a). With the question of labour power we are, in other words, confronted with human being as a purely potential being – without any function, *ergon*, not engaged in actual activity, *energeia*.

Aristotle derives *energeia* from *ergon* (function, task, work). *En-ergeia* is the state of being in work, functioning (Metaph. 1050a). Aristotle ties here in also the related notion of *telos* (end, completion, purpose). Because *ergon* is the completed, *energeia* is related to *entelecheia* (being in the state of completion): *energeia* is the functioning of a *dynamis* (potentiality, capacity), its fulfillment and actualization, normally accompanied with pleasure. From this follows that potentiality is contrary to pleasure, that what is never enacted, what never achieves its end. If pleasure, according to Aristotle’s definition, never takes place in time, potentiality is then essentially *duration*, that which prevents everything from being immediately given. The key of potentiality is its mode of being potential: not just as potentiality to do this or that thing, but as potentiality to not do, as power to not pass into actuality.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Marx, 1887: Part I, Ch. 1, Section 1

<sup>8</sup> Marx, 1887: Part II, Ch. 6

<sup>9</sup> “When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not speak of labour, any more than when we speak of capacity for digestion, we speak of digestion. The latter process requires something more than a good stomach” (Marx, 1887: Part II, Ch. 6).

<sup>10</sup> The essence of potentiality is the relation it has with its own privation, *steresis*, its non-being. See Agamben (1999) for a discussion of potentiality in exceptional clarity.

This power as the ontological condition, the species-being of human animal is always distinct from its particular acts, from the mediation of some use or justification (that is, history). It is something which does not have a place, which is not immediately present but yet real. It may have results, produce outcomes and have consequences, but it never “is” its results, outcomes and consequences. What characterizes potentiality is its dwelling outside of any task or function – its opposition to *energeia*, actuality – its dwelling outside ‘history’: it tends always towards surpassing its own time, its own historical situation in which it is never fully translated. It is always in a way outside history, withdrawn from historical time in which it is never fully exhausted – like Achilles who sulks in his tent when the Trojans attack the camp of the Achaeans. This means that this power cannot be completely actualized in a particular task, a single man or in any particular community of men. It is as if it resides in a multitude of mankind; it is the sociality of the ‘social individual’. The experience of this potential character of life is always an experience of a common and general power which resides in the multitude of human beings.. In multitude there is always something which remains potential and impotent, non-actualized and non-mediated. This impotentiality is its power which makes it general, unfailing and absolute. Multitude and the potential character of life identify with one another without a residue because the indwelling of commonness to any power is a function of the necessarily potential nature of any community. Or to put it sociologically: the social is included potentially in the individual, but it is expressed from the point of view of the particular (singular). It is always a multiplicity (contains all the relations) and a singularity (expresses a part of those relations).

The foundation of ‘labour power’ cannot therefore be said to be in any particular technological invention or in any particular technique like for example large-scale industry or division of work. As Marx writes, “to discover the various uses of things is the work of history”.<sup>11</sup> History is made of carrying into effect, or actualising, different ways of use. Labour power is above all the category in which the potential and common mode of existence of human beings as such – freed from any particular form of use and all traditional codes – *enters history*; that is, in which it is articulated into ‘use’, into the historical order of knowledge and power that constitutes capitalism. Capital is a social relation whose foundation is history ‘in itself’.

### **The Commodity Form of Labour Power**

The capitalistic society is the first to place in its centre the a-historical, untimely potentiality which must be distinguished from history. This ‘nonhistorical core’ is without a place or function within society but without it there would be no change.<sup>12</sup> But productive activity in general enters economy only in a specific form, or, more precisely, it acquires its particular historical function (production of surplus value), its value, only enclosed in a particular form, the commodity form, the form in which it can be sold and purchased.

This commodity (the general ability to work) does not have any actual or autonomous spatio-temporal (historical) existence. When something is exists only as a potentiality is sold, this something is not separable from the living person of the seller. Or as Marx says: “the use value which the worker has to offer to the capitalist, which he has to offer to others in general, is not materialized in a product, does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in

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<sup>11</sup> Marx, 1887: Part I, Ch. 1, Sect. 1

<sup>12</sup> On the difference between history and change, see Deleuze (1990: 170; 1993: 116). Deleuze calls the untimely also *dehors temporal*, the ‘temporal outside’, outside as a vital, recurring element. The vitalism is here not organic but temporal; see Deleuze (1998: 96).

potentiality, as his capacity”.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the living body becomes now a target of organization, not because of some intrinsic value or for the increase of its happiness, but because what has *meaning*: it is the body of labour power, it contains all those mental and physical capabilities (potential for speaking, thinking, remembering, learning.) existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being. The living body is the material container of potentiality, of not yet actualized labour, or as Marx says, of “labour as subjectivity”. Life and the living body become becomes the object of organization and control because the ability to do anything corporates there. As Paolo Virlo has noticed, it is because of this and only this that there is sense to talk about biopower. There is nothing mystical or mythological behind it, only this complementary space or assemblage of particular reasonings. The organization and protection of labour power is therefore not just an articulation of biopolitics but, on the contrary, biopolitics is just a consequence and one part or an articulation of the commerce of potential as potential.<sup>14</sup>

When the power to do anything is measured by its actual use (articulated as a proportion of time, an hour or a day of its expenditure) labour power as something potential and incommensurable, becomes commensurable (a homogenous temporal substance, common as abstract labour), a thing, a commodity among others which may be bought and sold. Yet labour power cannot be reduced to its particular value: it is at once the form of equivalence and the form of productive power. In other words, it is a special commodity because it can surpass its own limits: what is essential is its power not to pass into actuality, its ability to overstep its own limits, its ability to create surplus value. Herein lies the mystery of the origin of capitalist accumulation, the origin of surplus value: labour power seems like a commodity among others; it can be bought and sold and its existence and use seem in no way to break the rules of commodity exchange. In being purchased it seems that what is purchased is actual labour, fulfilled action, but the use of labour power to a task, its process of consumption, is always at the same time the production process of surplus value: in the consumption process the produced value is greater than the value of labour power (price by which it is purchased). In the *commodity form* the activity of production in general and its organization into history – the power that ties it to the system of commodity exchange and division of labour (certain historical structures) – are intertwined: “The process of production, considered on the one hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value, is production of commodities; considered on the other hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value, it is the capitalist process of production, or capitalist production of commodities”.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the capitalistic form of commodity production is based on the ability of labour power to create surplus value, on its ability to surpass its own limits and transform to another commodity – and it is in crises as soon as the labour power refuses to turn to a commodity. Why?

Or, how can labour power turn into a commodity and what is so central about it? That a commodity, in so far as it is a commodity, actualizes a social relation. In the commodity form the social constituent of labour power (mutual relations between people) acquires a concrete existence as a thing. Commodity “is a sensuous thing which is at the same time suprasensible or social”.<sup>16</sup> It contains or commmodifies something in common.

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<sup>13</sup> Marx Grundrisse 1973, 267.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Paolo Virno: Grammatica della moltitudine. Per una analisi della forme di vita contemporanee. Roma, DeriveApprodi 2002, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Marx, 1887: Part III, Ch. 7, Sect. 2

<sup>16</sup> Marx, 1887, Part I, Section I, Ch. 1; see also Agamben, 2000: 75; Debord, 1990

That which makes different use values or useful articles exchangeable is the “secret” or “soul” of the commodity, its *value*. The value of a commodity is that something ‘in common’; the exchangeability, social character, mutual relations contained in it. The exchangeability of the commodity as such does not concern the particular use of the commodity (of a coat, for example), and neither does it concern the actual, concrete labour (designing, cutting, sawing etc.) that went into its making. Above all value is to do with the relation between commodities (their exchangeability) and hence with the relation between people. Value embodies and makes real something abstract, something suprasensible.

But in order for value – this something suprasensible or social – to acquire concrete existence, it must acquire a corporeal form in the use value of another commodity which Marx calls the ‘value form’: it is the concrete form of its (suprasensible) value behind which sociality, the exchangeability in itself (the social character and mutual relations), now becomes hidden. The commodity, in so far as it is a commodity, actualizes in this double form a social relation (something in common): it is a sensuous thing which is at the same time suprasensible or social.

This means that the suprasensible social constituent of a commodity, the relation where it contains general social labour (cooperation, mutual relations between people, the social form of work) manifests itself now in a thing-form, in the use value of another commodity. In production based on exchange value, that is, in the commodity form of the production of value, the social relation takes in this way the form of the relation between things. In the world of commodity exchange people do not enter into direct relation with one another, but only through the indirect mediation of commodities, things or information.

In summa: to “have value” or to “be productive” the direct presence, immediate being and cooperation of people must be mediated or actualized by things (or by accomplishing particular tasks, meanings etc.). It is only by this precondition, by a mediation which can be distinguished from actual cooperation, that cooperation between people is productive and has value within the realm of the production of value in the commodity form. It is this arrangement of mediation that is now in crisis.

### **Labour Force as Mental Category**

The political problem of knowledge economy is not that different from that of the industrial society: it is still how to organize and control the labour force.

The two central political questions of the organization of modern societies were, on the one hand, the physical organization and control of labour force in spaces like factories, offices, schools etc. (disciplinary power) and the protection and guarding of labour power in the welfare state (biopolitics) on the other.

Today the labour force has however increasingly detached from its spatial, physical and biological aspects and become rather a “mental category”. The generic human capacities – intellect, perception, linguistic-relational abilities – have replaced machinery and direct labour in the core of value creation: what is put to work in Post-Fordist production are those general properties which make human beings “humans”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In the ‘Fragment on Machines’, which is the logical culmination and the highpoint of the antagonistic dialectic used in the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973, Heft VI-VII) thinks about this displacement of manufacturing labour in the production of wealth as a ‘natural development’ of capital. The development of capital proceeds to its ‘last phase’ because it itself begets a change in the nature of the production of value which causes the collapse of production based on exchange value. According to

Such labour force does not have any strict spatial or temporal coordinates; it rather moves in time and unrolls over the boundaries and hierarchies of space. In other words it is impossible to organize, control and locate such labour force through the place it belongs to, through the deeds it does or only at the level of the biological process of life. Labour force as a mental category concerns that dimension of human life – which Deleuze for example, following Bergson, calls *memory* (or time-life, life of the mind) – which prevents everything being immediately given and because of which we are not reducible to our spatial existence or to our position in a chronological continuum of time: even if You sit there at this moment reading this text, You are by no means reducible to this place, this task, or to this moment.

According to Paolo Virno the age old distinctions between the spheres of politics (political life, good life, action whose origin and purpose is in itself) and economy (labour, the sphere of instrumental action and the necessities of life), or *praxis* and *poiesis* begin to blur precisely when the elementary human faculties (the general conditions of being a human being) as a primary productive force cease to be ‘private’, inconspicuous and on the “background” and step to the foreground and become a matter of public organization.<sup>18</sup>

This change in the nature of the means of production is maybe best characterized as a change in the nature of *real abstraction*. For Marx, money or an act of exchange of labour power is a ‘real abstraction’: it makes real an abstract thought (the idea of equivalency). An actual act (the sale and purchase of labour power) expresses and makes real a structure of a bare thought. It has the validity or the value only of a thought. This is what a real abstraction is: a thought becoming actualized, a thought becoming a thing.<sup>19</sup>

In Post-Fordist production the question is however no longer that a certain actual fact (a sale and purchase of labour power, for example) had the value and validity of a thought. Rather it is now our thoughts in themselves that acquire the value earlier typical to ‘actual’ or ‘material’ facts but now without the

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Marx, the reason for this displacement is that at a point of this development it is likely that thinking and abstract knowledge will replace manufacturing labour as the most important force of production: knowledge replaces partitioned and repetitive labour, that is, industrial society and the society based on the division of labour in its traditional form. As a consequence of this transformation, it is neither direct human labour the worker performs (shaping materials of nature, production of new objects etc.) nor the time during which she or he works (the unit of this), but rather “the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body – it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth” (Marx, 1973: 705). In other words, the mere existence of human being as a human being and not as a performer of a particular task or as a member of a particular community (that is, man as such, man without any content) becomes now the foundation-stone of wealth. This is not to say that direct labour and factory production disappear but for the production of value they have become, as Marx puts it, a ‘miserable base’. In describing this transformation and the emerging ‘new foundation of value’ Marx uses the term *general intellect* (Marx 1973: 706). The concept of general intellect or *understanding in general*, as elaborated for example in *Luogo Comune* (e.g. no. 4, 1993), points to an ensemble of productive powers that constitutes the new centre of social production and organizes its vital dimensions a priori. It points at those general human abilities which are necessary to any act of production. General intellect and those general conditions of being a human being characterizing it organize not only the process of life but come now to organize also the production process directly. In other words, man ‘as such’, his or her entire personality and essential potentiality (‘to do anything’) becomes a means of production, a machine that replaces fixed capital and displaces into margins the knowledge that has materialized into machinery systems or automation (knowledge objectified in fixed capital).

<sup>18</sup> Virno, 2004: 64

<sup>19</sup> see Virno, 1996: 23; 2004: 64

necessity of any mediation or a corporeal form in the value form. Our thoughts, understanding in general, or 'the development of the social individual' as such, presents itself now with the weight and incidence typical of the production that had as its precondition the mediation and unity of measurement. The general human faculties (communicative interaction, abstraction, self-reflection) are now, in themselves, immediately – that is, without the mediation or incarnation into a thing – productive. They are no longer abstractions becoming real and productive through an incarnation into things, products, meanings, objectives or common aims, but 'ideals' that are productive and real in themselves without any such mediation. Rather than abstract and actual they are ideal and real: rather than real abstractions they are *ideal reals*, fleshly thoughts, flesh made of thought.

To understand the fleshliness of mental labour power we need concepts with which to think about the materiality of the spiritual, the corporeality of the incorporeal and must therefore give up old distinctions between material and spiritual. It is this becoming flesh of potentiality that characterizes our experience today: we can experience at the same time the abundance of our possibilities and the trivialness of all reasons. We can for the first time experience what it means to be a human, to be without a task or work and entirely open to future: we can look directly into our eye our power to do anything.<sup>20</sup> This experience makes us restless, bored and homeless. But it makes us also strong.

### **From Biopower to Power over Life of the Mind**

It seems to me that only this entrance of the *Gattungswesen* in production may explain the changes in the forms of organization and exercise of power we are confronting (like the permanently temporary war). The new formless form of war, the mad war or *potere senza senso* is the logical 'form' of organization and control within an economy that has become biopolitical, that is, in economy in which wealth is produced in modalities that are no longer conceivable with concepts of modern economy. To be able to organize and control human beings on the level of being human, as bare human beings, the new forms of control cannot afford to be withheld or slowed down by any particular institution and their particular tasks, but they must target the possibilities of life in general (both corporeal and incorporeal).

The new formless "forms" or uninstitutional "institutions" are born from the inadequacy and failure of the modern institutional forms of power when they confront indeterminate or "unclassified" people, people whose actions and orientation cannot be figured on the basis of their belonging to this or that community, or on the basis of performing this or that task. That is, when power confronts human beings as bare restless humans without any particular task, function or community, as people who can do anything and from whom anything may be expected. Mental labour force as the new spaceless and limitless subject of our societies means necessarily change in the organization and management of modern societies.

If the labour force of industrial societies was material in the sense that it was defined as an ability to say or do something particular or to belong to a particular place or a community and it could thus be organized through this particular meaning, action, place or a community, the mental labour force is something indeterminate and moving, something invisible and without a particular place or community. It moves on the level "spirit" rather than on "matter", it is determined by time and not by space. It "is" only in time where there are no clear boundaries for what was before and after, where clearly defined and bounded actions and places grow dim. Henri Bergson defined this indeterminateness as "time".

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<sup>20</sup> See Giorgio Agamben *L'opera dell'uomo. Forme di vita. La natura umana* 2004:1, 117-126.

It is precisely in this “time-life” or “life of the mind” that the old institutions meet their limits in being targeted only on the man-body or on the biological processes of a life of a population, and the new forms of control see possibilities – possibilities indeed, because the organization of labour force as a mental category is exactly about the control of the possibilities of thinking and acting.

Therefore, unlike biopower which formed man into a body that can be handled, managed and used in space (discipline) or which addressed a multiplicity of the man-species touched by illness, unemployment, the old age, rates of fertility and death (biopolitics), the new forms of organization and control do not any more target the man-body or the man-species, the physical or biological life of a man or a population. The life at the centre of politics is no longer the organic bio-life but rather the non-organic or a-organic life, the life without organs, where there are no external organs or vital functions by which it could be organized: the multiplicity of irreducible experiences cannot be organized in terms of individual bodies or as mere biological life of a population.

Whereas the disciplinary techniques dealt with the man-body in a closed space and biopolitics with the man-species in an open space (nation state as its limit) and both tried to coordinate and organize time pre-eminently through space, the organizational problem centres no longer on the biological life of a population or on the individual body and its particular actions, but rather on the man in general, the general premises of being a human being, that is, on life that has become unfastened from the man-body and the man-species. This life is not the actual life in space but life-time independent of any particular spaces or forms, the time due to which beings are not reducible to their corporeal manifestation in space or to their positions in the chronological continuum of time (to their spatial conditions). In other words, we are no longer dealing with power over biolife as in biopower, but rather with power over life of the mind, which does not so much create physical, spatial or biological boundaries (inscription of habits onto the body or biolife) but moods, sentiments and mentalities (inscription habits onto life of the mind). The organization of labour force as mental category is possible only through the management of the general conditions of human action and communication, through organizing the general conditions of organizing: it cannot be organized at the level of actual acts or products but on the level of potentiality and possibilities of life.

This *organization of organization* does not operate at the level of actual action or plain intimidation but on that of anxiety and inadequacy; not by confinement or demanding obedience to the rules and being afraid of their violation, but by setting expectations, moods, opinion climates, standards of communication and cooperation. It might perhaps be best described as *production of ethics*, as production of the (herd) “instinct” or “second nature” that guides our thinking, behaviour and self-realization. According to its Aristotelian formulation ethos is that “second nature” which guides self-realization, because it is that through which one becomes what one is to others. It is not an external but an internal force, because one needs to behave in the right way also when there is nobody to see (Nicomachean ethics I 9,1099). For such a “second nature” to be possible, for one to tend to express oneself to others, the desires must be organized from the beginning in a way that they follow the “father-reason”. But that reason, norm or law cannot remain external. This is to say that for one to behave in the right way, for one to want to behave in the right way, obedience is not enough and that the reason must become corporeal, it must become flesh. It is the only way to control and organize labour power as a mental category, that

is, not at the level of actual acts or products but on the level of potentiality and possibilities of life.<sup>21</sup>

The logic of the production of ethics can be analyzed as the production of self evidences or commonplaces.<sup>22</sup> The production of commonplaces (ethics) means exactly the organization and presetting of the conditions of action, thinking and communication. The self evidencies which were called in the Classical rhetoric *topoi koinoi* do not transmit any information, they do not contain any particular meaning, they cannot be contested, but only accepted, repeated and followed as if unnoticed. These “common places” are the conditions of all meaningful interaction. They are a kind of means of organizing thinking and memory; that is exactly why Aristotle calls them places (*topoi*). To remember a person or a thing it is enough to remember the place where we find it or to which it belongs: a place is a means of connecting thoughts. Without it we would be lost in the labyrinths of our memory. Production of ethics means that these starting points or conditions of action and thinking have transformed into preorganized “products” or objectives which operate as a means of managing the life of the mind. They form the grammar of the power over life of the mind which is immanent to the time-life itself and offers thus a way to its organization and control.

### **The Arbitrary Nature of the New Controls**

We can distinguish the new forms of organization and control from biopower also for another reason.

Whereas the modern (bio)power always received its “reason” or legitimation from a particular institution and its task (factory produces, hospital takes care of illness, state protects labour force, army wages war, research is done in a university), the new controls avoid committing or fixing themselves to any particular institution and its task which would set limits and tie and slow them down. The new form of control and organization has no permanent external reason or foundation like law, norm or a particular task within which it would function. It operates without institutional legitimation or its logic and foundations seems to change from day to day: it is power without *logos*, that is, arbitrary power or pure power, power without any permanent relation to law, to norm, or to some particular task. Its relation to any particular reason, task or meaning is arbitrary.<sup>23</sup>

Giorgio Agamben has called such a state a *state of anomy* where violence functions without any juridical cover. We must understand – and this could be thought as Agamben’s insight in *Stato di eccezione* (Bollati Boringhieri. Torino 2003) – that arbitrary power cannot be approached with the concept of the *state of exception*. The idea of the state of exception, as outlined by Carl Schmitt for example, is to try to establish a relation between arbitrary power and the norm or juridical order by any means. The state of exception always presupposes an order from which it gains its

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<sup>21</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato has defined this form of power as *noo-politics*, see Lazzarato: *Les Révolutions du Capitalisme: Un défi pour les altermondialistes*. Paris: Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond / Le Seuil 2004. The neologism is based on the Greek word *nous*, mind (memory), intellect, understanding. It is among other things that with which we understand self evidences or by which common places (*topoi koinoi*) seize us. See Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics, Books VI and XI. Ks. Aristoteles Nikomakhoksen etiikka.

Suomentanut Simo Knuuttila. Gaudeamus 1989, kirjjat VI, XI.

<sup>22</sup> See Jussi Vähämäki (2004) Controlling the Multitude. *Ephemera*. theory and politics in organization 4(3):233-245 [www.ephemeraweb.org](http://www.ephemeraweb.org)

<sup>23</sup> ”International legality” (Kuwait 1991), ”humanity” and ”human rights” (Somalia 1993, Bosnia 1995, Kosovo 1999), ”enduring freedom” (Afganistan 2001), ”fight against terrorism” (Iraq 2003).

legitimacy; it is always an attempt to try to establish a relation with something with which there is no relation. The state of exception means that the Force-of-Law keeps the law in operation even after its formal suspension.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, we should try to break this relation by showing the arbitrariness of arbitrary power. Agamben sets the task of showing the arbitrariness of arbitrary power as the most important tasks of politics today. Those who wish to deny this arbitrariness (the loss of faith in the sign) and restore the rules that govern the relation between meaning and reality wish to make us believe in the transcendence of meaning and to the un-historical nature of a particular mode of production. They wish us to deny our *experience*.

The arbitrary nature of arbitrary power means that whereas the modern (bio)power always received its legitimation as a means toward a particular end (factory produces, hospital takes care of illness, state protects labour force, army wages war, research is done in a university...), the arbitrary power is never simply a means toward an end. In other words, the arbitrariness of arbitrary power cannot be understood by approaching it in relation to ends that it as a means attempts to achieve, but rather its arbitrary nature means power as pure power, power as power without reasons or ends. The analysis of arbitrary power cannot therefore be about identifying a power which is just a justified or non-justified means towards this or that end, but which is in no relation to ends at all and operates “in some other way”.<sup>25</sup>

The arbitrariness of arbitrary power is therefore not a result of some intrinsic character which would distinguish it for example from modern biopower, that is, from means that always have an end or some institutional context or particular legitimation (from means that receive their “reason” or legitimation from a particular institution and its task) but from its arbitrary relation to these. This is how the concept of arbitrary power opens the nexus between the floating currency (the floating signifier) and the generic human capacities (intellect, perception, linguistic-relational abilities) as means of production, that is, the nexus between the era when the faith in the sign (or in any external reason directing action) is lost and the production of wealth in modalities that cannot be thought or understood by the concepts of modern economy.

It is precisely this loss of faith that distinguishes arbitrary power from despotic power and the overcoding of meaning characteristic to it.<sup>26</sup> In the Postscript to the Societies of Control Gilles Deleuze says that the changed conception of “money” perhaps best explains the transformation from disciplinary societies to those of control: whereas discipline was always related to molded currencies having gold as a numerical standard, control is based on floating exchange rates, modulations, organisations of the movement of currencies. In short, it tries to follow or imitate movements and exchanges as such, paying no attention to their specific contents.<sup>27</sup>

This is to say that the new formless form of power as a non-state, non-institutional form of intervention, is the logical “form” of power within an economy whose foundation has collapsed (organization without meaning). Knowledge economy is the continuance of capitalism without a foundation, and arbitrary power is its logical form of organization.

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<sup>24</sup> Force-of-Law is a technical way of writing “force of law without a law”.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin (1921) Zur Kritik der Gewalt. Kirjassa Tiedemann & Schweppenhäuser Gesammelte Schriften Vol II, 196.

<sup>26</sup> See Deleuze G. & F. Guattari 1972 L’Anti-Oedipe. Les Editions de Minuit.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze 1990: 230-1. According to Deleuze Foucault’s conception of pastoral power belongs to the disciplinary formation. See also Maurizio Lazzarato (2004) *Les Révolutions du Capitalisme: Un défi pour les altermondialistes*. Paris: Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond / Le Seuil.

## Organization without ends

But how can arbitrary power then function and manage without any legal or institutional task of justification?

In the *Stato di eccezione* Agamben does not get much further than posing this question. Instead the idea of the production of commonplaces (ethics) opens the door also to understanding such “operating in some other way” than as a means to an end. Let me therefore return shortly to the relation between a self-evidence and pure power.

When we accept a commonplace, a self-evidence, we accept it “as such”. We accept it as a repetition of something already known and already said. A self-evidence does not add anything new to a discussion. This is to say, more precisely, that when we accept a self-evidence we accept the person who says it, not because of what he or she says but because of what he or she is: we accept the person as such. This power to get through as such or get through a “message” without any content, a message which does not refer to anything outside itself, defines *authority*. A contentless message is a pure command, you cannot discuss it, you can only accept it, you can only follow and obey it. It does not say or tell anything outside itself, it only commands and demands acceptance as such. Self-evidence has thus a structure of a pure command where the mean detaches itself from the ends and which is thus only in relation to its own mediality. This means that it works “in some other way” than as a means to an end. Pure command is like a bare manifestation in which the word detaches itself from the thing or act and annuls the idea of the referentiality of language. It breaks the nexus between ends (or reasons, particular tasks, meanings) and means and therefore does not accomplish or say anything outside itself but only appears and functions. Because of the break it *cannot* say anything or do anything outside itself but only appear and function.

Just like a bare language is that which is not an instrument for communication, but communicates itself as such (communicativity as such), so arbitrary power or pure power is a pure command which does not refer to anything outside itself (not in a relation of means to an end, but only in relation to its own mediality) and can only be followed. It organizes and controls action and thinking by establishing conditions of action and thinking that can only be followed.

But if the functioning of arbitrary power is not based on reasons or on transmitting meanings and information contents, on what is it based? What is organizing without a common cause or interaction without meanings?

There were information ends, where meaningful action and meaningful reasons end, there begins imitation. Imitation is interaction beyond meanings and beyond particular common causes. It is interaction and communication without any particular reason, or interaction and communication in a deficit of information (or where there is too much information). Or as the empirical studies on investment behaviour have shown: what is important in the functioning of collective opinion or “market psychology” is not so much that what is communicated (the information content), but the way in which that what is regarded as a wise investment decision by ‘others’ is communicated (the communication ‘in itself’).<sup>28</sup>

Imitation is not about communicating some particular information or about meaningful interaction but about communication and interaction without them. Typical imitative behaviour takes place when people buy shares that others are buying without knowing exactly why or just

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<sup>28</sup> e.g. Marazzi, 2002, 2004; Orlean, 1999; Schiller, 2000; Shefrin, 2001; Keynes, 1973.

following the “market sentiment”. They trust that the others know as the others trust that they know. Such trust does not have any positive content as information: it is based on *general expectations* of how people in general act or think. The deficit (or abundance) of information constrains people to navigate in the world with the help of these most elementary human faculties – ‘instincts’, as it were – which do not contain or transmit any specific information. Ontology reveals itself phenomenologically: that the general human capacities which make human beings “humans” (Gattungswesen) enter to our immediate experience, to economy and politics, means exactly this. As a concept, multitude means the form of being a human in which the ontological condition, the human condition, enters our immediate experience. To say that it enters economy means that it no longer needs the mediation in the use value of another commodity to be productive and have value. To say that it enters politics means that it no longer needs any mediation in the common cause to be political.

We can for the first time look into eye our being as potential beings without any particular task or function or surrounding, as beings that can do anything and from which anything can be expected. The flexibility of humans, their capacity to live in almost every imaginable environment, to bask in any conceivable ambiance, is an active and not a passive faculty. The human being creates its own ambiance and its own problems. It is an animal that is able to change its fate.<sup>29</sup> Arbitrary power over life of the mind organizes and subordinates the species-being of human beings (ability to create meanings with a reason, ability to create something new) which is without any function and always open to change to the particular and already structured tasks and aims of a particular historical period. The time of arbitrary power means a redivision or a reappropriation which is directed at the general characteristics of the human species, at those general properties which make human beings ‘humans’. If we want some grounds for politics, it is in the participation in the fight for the direction of this transformation. What is at stake is not just this or that historical fact, or this or that injustice, but the element of change as such. In this fight we have no other resources to turn to except ourselves, that is, this ability to do anything characterizing us. This experience of the bare “I can” does not refer to any particular ability or faculty but to our nature as such. It is the maybe most severe and cruel experience possible: the experience of potentiality. At the moment of the experience of potentiality when we experience at the same time the abundance of our possibilities and the trivialness of all reasons, we can paradoxically only rely on ourselves. When we don’t have anything, we can rely on everything.

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<sup>29</sup> This idea is one of the keys to reading Deleuze’s book on Bergson (Deleuze 1966).